

INFOTECH

# Bring Back the Joy:

## Creative Teaching, Learning, and Librarianship

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**“F**or the first time, research shows that American creativity is declining. What went wrong—and how can we fix it.” (Bronson & Merryman, *Newsweek*, July 19, 2010, p. 44).

A decade of strict standards, serious budget cuts, and sobering statistics has left teachers stressed out and students apathetic. It's time to bring the joy of learning back into our schools.

Humans derive pleasure from constructing, innovating, and building. In addition, a balance of critical and creative thinking is important in learning. Creativity is emerging as a popular theme in the latest round of standards revisions.

“Creativity and Innovation” is the first standard on the International Society of Technology Education's National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS).

The American Association of School Librarian's Standards for the 21st-Century Learner stress the importance of students “creating new knowledge.” Students are asked to “create products that express new understandings” and “create products that apply to authentic, real-world contexts.”

In this article, we'll explore engaging technology tools that involve students in creative thinking, constructing knowledge, and developing innovative products.

### THINK DIFFERENT

Start your quest for creativity by thinking in new ways about reference sources. Use new tools to help you and your students explore, ponder, and contemplate. For instance rather than using a traditional paper thesaurus, think graphically by exploring a visual thesaurus.

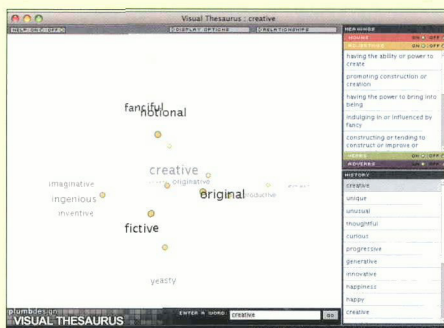


Figure 1: Visual Thesaurus

Search for words such as “creativity” and “innovation” using three different online tools: Visual Thesaurus, [www.visualthesaurus.com/](http://www.visualthesaurus.com/), VisuWords, [www.visuwords.com/](http://www.visuwords.com/), Lightweight Visual Thesaurus [awordlike.textdriven.com/](http://awordlike.textdriven.com/). Figure 1 shows an example from the Visual Thesaurus software.

Visual dictionaries are also great tools for thinking in new ways about curriculum content and assignments. Use the Visual Dictionary at [visual.merriam-webster.com/](http://visual.merriam-webster.com/). These images can be embedded in student blogs or other web-based projects using their blog tools, [visual.merriam-webster.com/tools\\_blog-tools.php](http://visual.merriam-webster.com/tools_blog-tools.php). Simply click the “Blog This” choice in the upper right corner of the page containing the visual, copy their code, and paste it into the HTML of your page.

Use vocabulary websites such as VocabAhead, [vocabahead.com](http://vocabahead.com), to jumpstart a discussion with students about how they might create their own animated dictionaries using a tool like Go!Animate, [goanimate.com/](http://goanimate.com/).

### PROVIDE OPTIONS

When addressing the needs of today's diverse student population, we need to provide varied opportunities and resources to stimulate creativity. When a child's vision doesn't match their artistic skills, technology can help bridge the gap.

Avatar generators are a great example of engaging tools that can provide a springboard for innovative thinking.

After reading books such as *Cock-a-Doodle-Moo: A Mixed Up Menagerie* by Keith Duquette, *Scranimals* by Jack Prelutsky and Peter Sis, *I Wish I Had Duck Feet* by Dr. Suess, and *The Whingingdilly* by Bill Peet, children go to the Build Your Wild Self, [buildyourwildself.com/](http://buildyourwildself.com/), web site and design a human character with animal body features. The website provides scientific information about each body part that can be incorporated into a fictional story about animal adaptation.

Web sites such as Grabba Beast, [grabbaseast.com/](http://grabbaseast.com/), can be used for doing a project such as Monster Exchange, [DECEMBER 2010 61](http://www.monster-</a></p>
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Figure 2: Build Your Wild Self

exchange.org/, where one child creates a monster and a written description. Then, a peer tries to recreate the visual based on the description only.

Use avatar generators to help young authors visualize their characters. Use MyAvatarator, [www.myavatarcreator.com](http://www.myavatarcreator.com), to create characters for fictional Wii games or use Colonial Dress Me Up, [www.pbs.org/wnet/colonialhouse/history/dress\\_up\\_flash.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/colonialhouse/history/dress_up_flash.html), 18th Century Paper Doll, [www.history.org/kids/games/dollgame.cfm](http://www.history.org/kids/games/dollgame.cfm), or What's Your Dark Ages Character?, [www.history.com/interactives/dark-ages](http://www.history.com/interactives/dark-ages), to build characters for historical fiction projects.

## MODEL INNOVATIVE TOOLS

By modeling use of technology, young people can generate ideas for how they might incorporate audio, video, and animation into their projects. For instance rather than a teacher reading a book aloud their class, you might suggest playing the audio book version instead. Or, reading from an e-book reader. Then ask students to create their own audio version of a story they've written.

The Sea of Trolls WebQuest, [sites.google.com/site/theseaof trollswebquest/](http://sites.google.com/site/theseaof trollswebquest/), by Jessica Hinman provides an example

of how teachers can incorporate innovative approaches and technologies into their assignments. Before asking students to use the animation tool GoAnimate, [goanimate.com/](http://goanimate.com/), Hinman wove the technology into another assignment to demonstrate its use.

Jumpstart projects by providing young people with tools and resources they can use in completing classroom assignments. Rather than spending time "googling" for Viking images, show students free or public-domain resources such as DK Clipart,

[dorlingkindersley-uk.co.uk/static/es/uk/11/clipart](http://dorlingkindersley-uk.co.uk/static/es/uk/11/clipart).

## INFUSE VARIED RESOURCES

When designing pathfinders expose students to many methods of communication. Then, infuse a wide variety of resources into learning materials and assignments. Let's use the topic of Charles Darwin and The Origin of Species as an example. Ask students to explore resources. Then, create their own original technology-rich products based on a science topic of their choice. Students could:

- Listen to a public-domain audio recording; then create a podcast from original content. Use the LibriVox <[librivox.org](http://librivox.org)> the-origin-of-species-by-charles-darwin/> audio version of The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin to demonstrate effective reading techniques.
- Watch historical re-enactments; then create a vodcast of original content or historical accounts. Use Evolving Ideas, [teachersdomain.org/resource/tde02.sci.life.evo.lp\\_darwin/](http://teachersdomain.org/resource/tde02.sci.life.evo.lp_darwin/), from Teacher Domain for multimedia examples.
- Read a picture book; then a visual story based on science content that would be accessible for young children. Use *One Beetle Too Many: The Extraordinary Adventures of Charles Darwin* by Kathryn

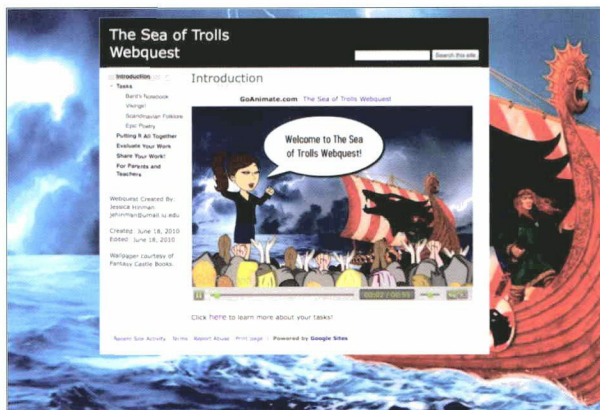


Figure 3: GoAnimate and the Sea of Trolls WebQuest





## GRAPHIC NOVELS

## STONE ARCH

**Cenicienta.** Beth Bracken and Jeffrey Stewart Timmins. Stone Arch, 2009. 978-1-4342-1900-8.

**The Emperor's New Clothes.**

Stephanie True Peters and Jeffrey Stewart Timmins. Stone Arch, 2009. 978-1-4342-1595-6.

**Jack y Los Frijoles Magicos.** Blake A. Hoena and Ricardo Tercio. Stone Arch, 2010. 978-1-4342-1902-2.

**The Princess and the Pea.** Stephanie Peters and M.A. Lamoreaux. Stone Arch, 2009. 978-1-4342-1594-9.

\$22.65 each. Grades 3 and up.

Publishers learned a long time ago that they can make a quick buck off cheaply made retellings of classic (i.e., out-of-copyright) fairy tales. As a result, librarians are automatically wary of a publisher who releases a spate of new fairy tale adaptations.

Well, you don't have to be wary of these books. Stone Arch has put its best foot forward with this new line of graphic novel adaptations of fairy tales, books that succeed on every front. The ones I've listed above are my particular favorites, but I have not seen a bad book in this new line.

*Cenicienta*, a Spanish-language retelling of the familiar Cinderella story, is a fine example. The book is bound in a sturdy yet attractive library edition, and the high-quality paper makes the painted colors leap off the page, as for example in a panel featuring the brilliant glow from within a magical coach headed toward a certain legendary ball. The translations are also strong, with natural word choice and dialogue that pays attention to the nuances of class as the poor and the wealthy speak to one another.

With these stylish new fairy tale adaptations, Stone Arch has reset the standard.

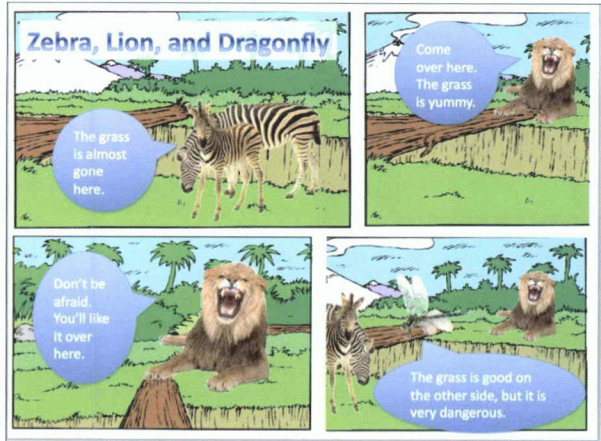


Figure 4: Trickster Tale in PowerPoint.

Lasky as an example.

- Read historical fiction; then write a narrative connecting science with humanity. Use *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith* by Deborah Heiligman as an example.
- Read a graphic adaptation; then create visual projects to convey important scientific principles. Use *Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species: A Graphic Adaptation* by Michael Keller as an example.
- Read nonfiction; then create timelines or concept maps to share scientific ideas. Use *Evolution Revolution: From Darwin to DNA* from DK for ideas.
- Explore diaries and drawings; then create visuals or electronic scrapbooks to convey scientific ideas. Use Charles Darwin's notebooks, [darwin-online.org.uk/EditorialIntroductions/vanWyhe\\_notebooks.html](http://darwin-online.org.uk/EditorialIntroductions/vanWyhe_notebooks.html), for examples.
- Examine caricatures; then create cartoons and caricatures to represent scientific ideas. Use *A Venerable Orang-outang*, [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Darwin\\_ape.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Darwin_ape.jpg), as an example.

## SCAFFOLD CREATIVITY

Students can be overwhelmed when faced with producing a totally original product. Design learning environments that provide

support and guidance as they learn the concepts necessary to successfully complete a creative task. The Trickster Tales WebQuest, [web.me.com/alshoema/Trickster\\_Tales/Welcome.html](http://web.me.com/alshoema/Trickster_Tales/Welcome.html), by Alissa Shoemaker is a wonderful example of how a well-designed series of activities can provide scaffolding for student creativity. Young people take small steps toward a creative product. In this case, they begin by reviewing prior knowledge, learning about trickster tales and comparing stories, adapting and retelling story. Then students create their own original work.

If you don't have access to Comic Life software for creating original stories, use some of the PowerPoint Sidekicks, [eduscapes.com/sessions/sidekicks/stories.htm](http://eduscapes.com/sessions/sidekicks/stories.htm), to get started. Then, add visuals from DK Clipart. Rather than treating all aspects of PowerPoint, introduce the tools necessary for a particular task. For example, use the TRANSPARENCY tool in PowerPoint to remove the white background in the objects. Use the CROP tool to show one aspect or to focus on the main element of a visual. Use other tools such as flip and rotate for different views of the same creature. With this approach, a couple of backgrounds and objects can be used to tell an entire story.

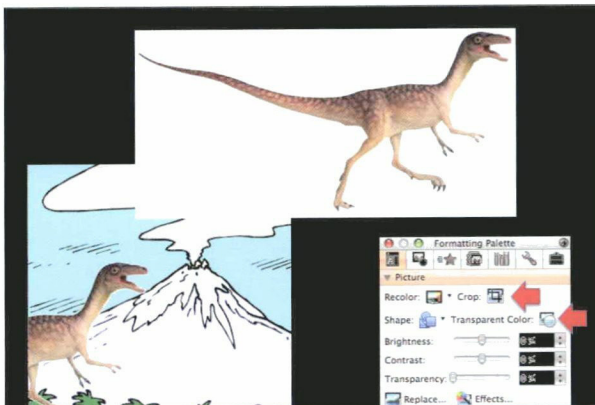


Figure 5: Apply PowerPoint tools CROP and TRANSPARENCY

## TEACH CREATIVELY

Creative teaching uses a combination of modeling, scaffolding, and risk-taking to jumpstart innovative thinking and imagination. The Brooklyn Nine WebQuest, sites.google.com/site/thebrooklynninewebquest/home, by Karen Steinberger is a wonderful example connecting a novel with authentic learning. The novel *The Brooklyn Nine* by Alan Gratz uses the innings of a baseball game as the structure of book chapters. In the WebQuest, young

people are asked to create baseball cards based on the themes in the book, as well as think about how local history could be organized in a unique way.

In this assignment, students learn to set the Microsoft PowerPoint slide to 2.5 x 3.5 to replicate the size of a baseball card.

Other historical themes and curricular topics could also be explored in creative ways using tools such as ReadWriteThink Interactives, [readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/](http://readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/).

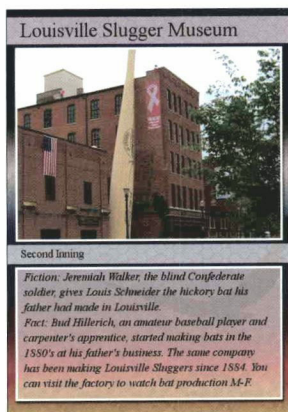


Figure 6: Baseball Card.

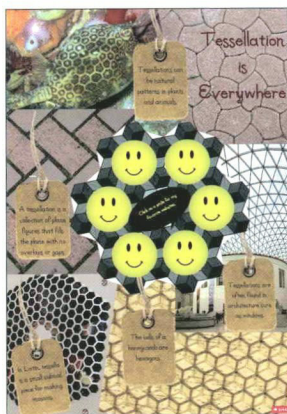


Figure 7: Tessellation project using Glogster.

HugelLabs online tools, [bighugelabs.com/](http://bighugelabs.com/), and Inspiration software for scaffolding.

## COLLABORATE

As you work with teachers, discuss alternative approaches to assignments and assessments. Rather than a traditional test, young people might be asked to share their understandings in creative ways using technology tools.

Figure 7 shows an example of how Glogster, [edu.glogster.com/](http://edu.glogster.com/), can be used to create posters that share math concepts. The key is designing assignments that reflect the learning outcome and at the same time allow students to be creative in their approach. When selecting technology, look for options with flexible tools and educator versions.

## AUTHENTIC, CREATIVE APPROACHES IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

As you work toward bringing the joy back to learning, consider the resources and tools you suggest for teachers and learners. Look for innovative methods of communication and engaging learning materials.

The word "creativity" can manifest itself in different ways. We often lump all types of creativity into one category, however creativity can have many facets. Creative approaches shouldn't be fake or contrived. They can result in real-world solutions and meaningful products.

Generative. Some young people need a seed, starter, or prompt to kick-start ideas and creativity. Generative assignments involve producing new life or propagating offspring from an initial seed or idea. A meaningful theme and pathfinder of resources can provide the seed.

The year 2010 is the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. Ask students to learn about the war and generate a product that reflects a local connection. One student might build a project focusing on the topic of the Korean War and military desegregation using the website Stixy, [stixy.com](http://stixy.com). Another learner could create a collage using showing a plan for a local Korean War memorial.



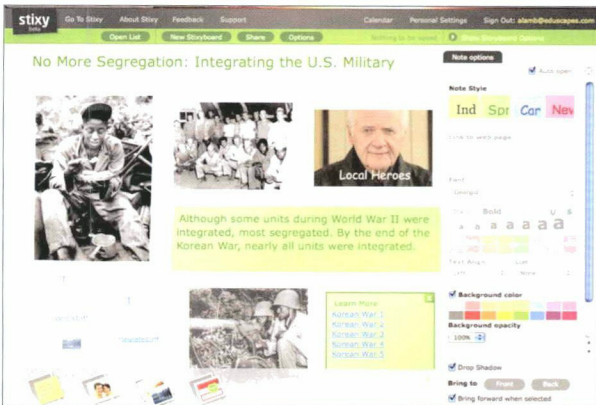


Figure 8: Korean War project using Stixy.

Inventive: Marked by independence in thought or action, inventive projects ask students to derive a new device or process from pre-existing or independently conceived ideas. Use a book such as *The Unusual Mind* of Vincent Shadow by Tim Kehoe to get students thinking about the process of inventing toys. Then, introduce the book and website *Howtoons*, [howtoons.com](http://howtoons.com), for examples of how inventions can be produced. Use downloadable software such as Sketchup, [sketchup.google.com](http://sketchup.google.com), to design models and Comic Life to share results.

Originative: Beyond simply building a product, originative students develop seminal ideas that provide the foundation for the work of others. Encourage originative thinking by reading books that present different points of view such as *George vs. George* by Rosalyn Schanzer. This book explores the Revolutionary War through the eyes of both George Washington and King George III. Working in pairs, ask students to create their own informational story about two people, animals, buildings, events, sides of an issue, or possible solu-



Figure 9: Howtoons website.



## WEB SITES

### IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

#### FOR EDUCATORS:

**History of Angel Island—the Journey to America.** <http://aisf.org/index.php/history>. The Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation's web site provides a historical overview of immigration on the West Coast. Site includes poems written on barrack walls, historical photographs, curriculum guides, and a five-part newspaper series.

**Library of Congress Classroom Materials.** <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials>. The Library of Congress provides a vast array of educator materials, including:

**American Memory Timeline: Industrial America, Presentations and Activities—Presentations—Timelines—Rise of Industrial Era.** The site includes a section focusing on Chinese immigration and another relaying the experiences of French Canadian, Norwegian, and German immigrants.

**Immigration: The changing Face of America: Presentations and Activities—Presentations—Immigration.** This educator's guide to introduce the topic, focusing on eleven immigration waves during the late 19th and early 20th century. Site includes interviews, interactive vocabulary activities, and recipes.

**Immigration Challenges for New Americans: Primary Source Sets** Photographs, maps, official documents, song sheets, and streaming audio recount the immigrant experience in America and the reactions of established Americans are available at this web site.

**The New Americans.** <http://www.pbs.org/independents/newamericans/>. Written for students in grades 7-12, this Independent Lens mini-series shares the stories of recent immigrants from five different regions, including updates on their lives now. The *Bookmarkit* section for Educators includes eleven lesson plans.

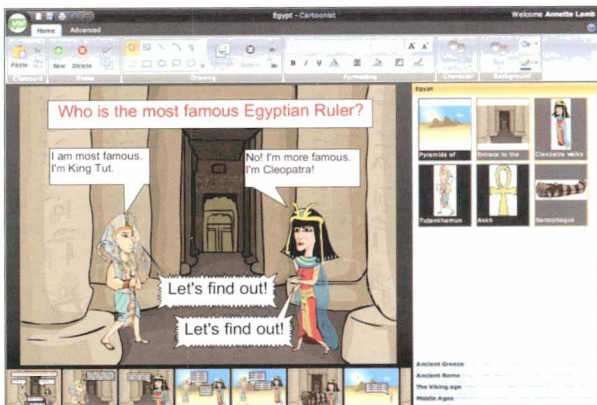


Figure 10: King Tut vs. Cleopatra with Creaza.

tions. Get them thinking in new ways of the world. Use tools such as Pixton, [pixton.com/](http://pixton.com/), or Creaza, [creaza.com](http://creaza.com), to build products that express their fresh viewpoint.

Productive: Spending time wisely, making good choices, and constructing quality materials are signs of a productive student. By setting the stage with quality resources and easy-to-use tools, you can help students be more productive.

For instance Geoffrey Hayes has written a series of graphic stories for young people such as Benny and Penny in *The Big No!* These stories may stimulate interest in creating cartoons. Use the Cartoon Maker from Toon Books <[toon-books.com/fun\\_cm.php](http://toon-books.com/fun_cm.php)> to scaffold student productions using character and illustration styles from the stories. Then introduce students to oth-

er tools for producing comics from scratch.

## CONCLUSION

The school library should be a joyful place for learning. As you build relationships with teachers, seek out resources and activities that bring excitement to the learning environment. Rather than simply reading the book *Leviathan* by Scott Westerfeld, ask students to enjoy, explore, and engage with the reading experience. Start your movement toward a more creative library by rethinking your books lists and activity guides. Use tools such as Google Sites <[sites.google.com](http://sites.google.com)> to build pathfinders that help young people explore the people, places, and ideas found in stories they read. The *Leviathan Pathfinder*, [sites.google.com/site/leviathanpathfinder](http://sites.google.com/site/leviathanpathfinder), by Karen Steinberger is a great example of this shift in thinking about how we engage young people in the joy of reading.

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Adapted from a presentation by Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson available at <http://eduscapes.com/sessions/creativity/>.

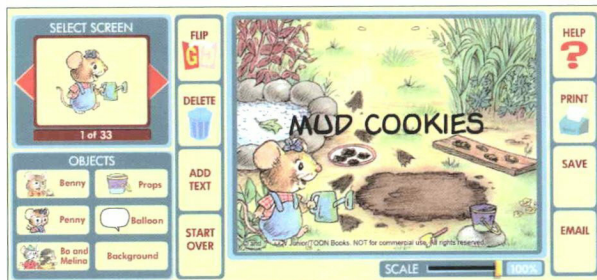


Figure 11: Toon Books Cartoon Maker.